Chapter III

FEUDAL ORDERS OF THE POLIGARS
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The poligars represented the feudal order in the Tamil Country. The responsibilities and functions of these chieftains appeared similar in many respects to those of the feudal barons of medieval Europe and the jagirdars and zamindars of medieval India. In fact the possession of estates and protection of their subjects usually formed the basis of their authority and influence. The poligars, as the medieval barons did, held possession of tracts of land, as their estates on a military tenure. They maintained their own armed retinue or armed establishment yet unlike the nobles in medieval Europe, the poligars of the Tamil Country claimed no proprietary rights on the lands of the inhabitants and never considered the cultivators as their serfs. The jagirdars of Moghul India rendered military and at times civil service too, to the sovereign in return for the right to possess estates, while the zamindars paid rents to the ruler. On the other hand the poligar chief combined in himself the powers and functions of the jagirdars of the zamindars. As local chiefs they held possession of their own territory, maintained establishment of army, police and revenue and undertook social and cultural activity. They were the administrators of their respective estates, renters to their sovereign commanders of their own forces, guardians of public welfare and ryots among the peasants. In fact poligar combined in himself the authority of a ruler as well as the status of a subject in the local community. Accordingly, his functions included
maintenance of bodies of troops continually equipped for military service protection of their own communities, suppression of criminals, punishment of offenders against person and property and payment of compensation in the event of their failure to restore property lost through theft. In return for the due fulfillment of these duties, the poligar was treated as the proprietor of the rent from his estate. A concentration of rights and responsibilities, arising from a combination of these obligations and functions accounted for the influence of the poligars of the Tamil Country.

Poligari Estate

The territorial extent of the feudal estate called palayam varied from each other. Ramnad and Sivaganga were the largest, while Maniachi and Ezhayirampannai were among the smallest. Each palayam consisted of villages, personal lands of the chieftain, public lands and temple lands. The jurisdiction of the poligar extended beyond the borders of his territory, if he exercised the right of protecting the inhabitants of the circar villages.

As the feudal baron did, the poligar kept a part of his district, usually

the best land, for his own cultivation. He kept heads of bullocks and several ploughs and employed workers for cultivation. The British records indicate an instance that a chieftain of Anamalai kept 120 ploughs for the cultivation of his personal lands and levied upon his people no taxes for his private expenses. The rest of the personal estate of the poligar was distributed among his servants called, sherogars who were both solidiers and peasants. The sherogars and their followers cultivated the fields in times of peace and rallied to their chieftains for military service, whenever there were hostilities. This arrangement enabled the poligars to assemble a considerable number of troops at short notice. The Setupati of Ramnad for instance, found it no difficult a task to assemble 30,000 to 40,000 armed men on a week’s notice. However it cannot be denied that the two fold nature of the service made them at the most irregulars, more useful for guerrilla war than for pitched battles.

The people, who were related to or associated with the poligar, either because of common identity or because of loyal service held a privileged status in the villages. They entrusted the actual cultivation of land with a community of workers, called the Pullers, who were the counterparts of serfs in a baronial estate in Europe. The workers, who tilled the fields belonging to the poligar, received as

compensation a quantity of dry grain but those, who tilled the fields of the
sherogars as military chieftains under a poligar received a fixed share of the
harvest. Status of the employers and preference of the farm workers perhaps
accounted for different practices. At no time did the field workers of the estates
receive wages needed to live a life above marginal subsistence. This was
particularly so in the case of the Pullers in poligar lands. Thought they were not
tied to the estate as in medieval Russia, their poverty was of such dimension that
they were forced to sell their services for long terms. In that case, it is pointed out,
the local custom gave their master the right to extract every kind from them - to
mortgage them to another master for the money borrowed, to hire them out to
others for daily labour and even to transfer them to another person, by whom they
were held in the same bondage. Yet it cannot be concluded that the status of such a
field worker was not different from that of a black slave; for they were not
subjected to it compulsorily and were permitted to go free on the fulfillment of the
agreed conditions. The want of employment opportunities and prevalence of
appalling poverty accounted for this tragic situation. This was the feature not only
in the poligar estates but also in the circar territories too. Despite their scanty
means of subsistence, the Pullers eager to obtain relief from affliction in bondage,
usually contracted their wants to the were preservation of their lives, with an
expectation that the accumulation of their savings might enable them to purchase
their freedom at not a distant future. This would happen with no difficulty, when
their master consented to release them on receipt of an amount or when he was involved in some distress. On obtaining their freedom from bondage these workers usually mobilised all their resources to improve their lot as could be expected from liberated people. 4

Many of the palayams were situated in the hilly regions of the country and were covered with jungles to a large extent. The poligars cleared the forests, formed villages, constructed reservoirs and promoted cultivation. 5 Also they took interest in cultural activities like temple festivals, constructed agrahaars for the Brahmins and participated in horse race, buffaloe race and the like. In fact the poligars in general identified their interests with those of the people of their territory 6, yet maintaining a life style of their own.

Administration of the Estate

Irrespective of the extent and resources of his territory the poligar maintained a government of his own and observed those forms and ceremonies, which were usually associated with the royal houses. In his palayam he was the


absolute ruler, exercising both civil and military authority. He collected taxes and customs, enforced law and order, maintained his own armed establishment and administered justice. Though he was not allowed to construct forts without the consent of the sovereign, in practice he did not observe this restriction upon his authority. In fact the function at style of the poligar resembled those of a virtual king.7

Among the public officials of the palayam the principal minister was called the pradhan or dalawai. He assisted the poligar in the transaction of public affairs and exercised more powers or less, depending upon the character and calibre of his master. The poligar was the commander of his army and was assisted by the military officers called sherogars. He had his accredited minister, called stanapati, at the court of the ruler. It was through this representative that he carried on official correspondence with the central government. Such a practice continued for long. However when the Wallajahs their authority over the Tamil Country they at the instance of the English dispensed with the ministers of the poligars.

As a rule the chieftains gave considerable importance to their dignified and elegant appearance in public. The paraphernalia, needed for appearance, included among other things turban, turban band, laurel for the head, war bracelets, gold

chains, bangles, golden bells to be tied around the waist, white fleece, sticks, flags, umbrella, torch and parasoles. Because of a complex of status and dignity and determined to leave an impression with the people all around, each chieftain wasted much of his time to equip himself with sophisticated items and reduced himself to self imposed ordeal in this warm country. More than these on important occasions the poligar adorned himself like a peacock and held grand durbars. Extravagance marked the celebration of all marriages in his family. He rode on horse, camel or elephant or travelled in palanquins. Accompanied usually by a large retinue, his movements were attended with considerable pomp and splendour. 

Village communities functioned in the territories of the poligars. Except in cases of internal feuds the poligars did not normally interfere with their working. The village had a local council. In the democratically constituted councils all land holders were members, while in other bodies only the representatives of different communities. The village council on the poligar appointed the village headman and the village accountant, normally on a hereditary 

10. Sewell’s List, Copper Plate No.65A.
basis. The headman called maccadam or patel, as the intermediary between the poligar and the villagers, commanded considerable influence. He served as the collector of taxes, magistrate and judge. The village accountant called karnam assisted the village headman in the performance of his functions. He kept a rosham or register, which furnished details of all land holdings in the village. The subordinate establishment consisted of the kavalkars or watchmen and the totiens or scavengers. No uniform system of remunerating the local servants remained in force. They were compensated for their service either in the form land, grain or cash.¹¹

The administration of justice received no serious attention as in any other part of the country during the period. Nevertheless the local panchayat and the poligar settled the cases. The panchayat tried the parties, who were involved in cases and gave its verdict. If it found it difficult to ascertain and decide the matter of dispute the trial by boiled ghee was resorted to and it was performed with great solemnity.¹² However the working of the panchayat was not free from irregularities, for influence and bribery had their baneful effect upon the jury. Yet

¹¹. Correspondence relating to the Revision of Village Revenue Establishments of the Madras Presidency, Fort St.George, 1866, p.6-8.

it served as a corrective to the prevailing system, for if the litigants had no such body, they received no settlement at all. When the people relied upon verbal promises and entered into transactions without proper documentation, the panchayat familiar with the day to day developments came to their rescue. If the parties felt that they received no justice, they were free to appeal to the chieftain, who served as a higher court.\textsuperscript{13} Still the poligar could award no death penalty or mutilation without the consent of the sovereign. Approval of capital punishment was not found possible, when there was no sovereign or when his authority was weak during periods uncertainly and it was found anachronistic, when the sovereign himself allowed killing in return for payment of money.\textsuperscript{14}

**Income and Expenditure**

The sources of revenue of the poligar were principally the rent from the lands, income from the personal possession, customs and kaval dues. His share of the produce was known as *pottuchilavu*, which literally meant common-expanse. It was estimated at fifty percent of the yield, the assessment being made on the basis of soil conditions of the fields.

\textsuperscript{13}Selections from the Records of Fort St. George, 1816, No.11.

\textsuperscript{14}Military Country Correspondence, Fort St.George, 20 March 1795, Vol.46, p.32.
The share of the chieftain was regulated by ‘mamool’ or custom, but it being an undefined term, was used in reality as a plea for committing every kind of abuse. The fluctuations of taxes, the want of an established standard in the assessment of dry-grain fields and the intricate details of ready-money collections were real evils in the revenue administration of the poligar territories. The peasants, on their part, relied upon evasive tactics against the irregularities in the administration of revenue. It was a common practice that a ryot managed to possess greater extent of land than what was found on the records, either by keeping the actual extent unnoticed by the officials or by bribing the surveyors. The additional area for which the peasant paid no tax varied from 50 to 100 percent of the extent of the land, for which he actually paid. Thus the system rested upon a state of conflict between oppressive exaction and fraudulent evasion.15

For the purpose of taxation the cultivated lands were classified into four categories, based upon productivity, as decided by ascertaining the nature of the soil. They were (1) kirsul or black cotton soil, free from stones and sand, (2) shevul or land containing a mixture of red soil, gravel stones and sand, (3) pottul or land with a mixture of black and white soil with stones and (4) veppul or land with a mixture of brown earth, clay and sand. This classification was applied only

15. Lusington’s Report to the Board of Revenue, 29 December 1800, pp.9-14.
on wet lands, while the dry lands were dealt with differently. This indicates that a scientific analysis of lands was attempted for deciding the criterion for levies.\textsuperscript{16}

The ryots in the poligar territory were not completely free from exaction and oppression, which were in fact the order of the day. Yet they were not of the proportions as in the circar country. In the \textit{palayam}, the inhabitants had to pay tax or rent only to the chieftain and the village committee while in the circar territory to the central authority, local administrators, village committees and the invading maraudars. Not unfrequently the poligars too collected contributions from circar territories. There were instances when the peasants unable to bear the Nawab’s oppression took shelter in the \textit{palayams}. Indirectly this alternative that was open to the inhabitants had a mitigating effect upon the central administration. In the opinion of the British administrators the economy of Ramnad appeared prosperous when the Setupatis were in power, but it collapsed by 1765 when the Nawab assumed the direct administration.\textsuperscript{17} In 1765 when the Nawab annexed the \textit{palayams} of Ariyalur and Wodayarpalayam, his amuldars found the taxes so low that they increased them by four times.\textsuperscript{18} These instances indicate that the inhabitants of the poligar territories were required to shoulder much less burden of

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., pp.10-14.

\textsuperscript{17}Madras Council, Military Consultations, 15 June 1772, Vol.42, p.488.

levies than their counterparts in other areas. This situation, however, had changed drastically as the eighteenth century advanced towards its end. This was because the Nawab handicapped by mismanagement and harassed by the British for presents and contributions, oppressed the chieftains and the latter in their turn enhanced the taxes that were levied upon the people. The Nawab and the British were responsible to a large extent if the poligars were set against the inhabitants of their own territories.

The poligar spent the money collected from his subjects under different items of expenditure. He paid tribute to the sovereign in normal times and used the rent for supporting his civil and armed establishments and his household. The tribute called Pesiheush was divided into installments called kists. Every year the chieftains sent their representatives to a specified place, generally the taluq headquarters, for verification of accounts by the officials. The armed servants were not always paid in cash. Lands at concessional rent were left in the possession of military servants. Every year the chieftains spent large sums as charitable endowments particularly for religious purposes and for promoting cultivation and armament.

The chieftains defrayed the remuneration to their servants in the civil and military establishments in the form of money or grain or land. Money payments

were either nominal or actual. During those days of unemployment and uncertainly many people took up service without pay, just for gaining experience and in anticipation of securing a job in some distant future. In regard to actual payments, the servants as a rule, were not paid the full amount, for which their services were engaged. The importance that the inhabitants attached to the glamour of high pay contributed to his anomaly, though they were certain of receiving only a third to half of the stipulated wages. If they felt themselves aggrieved, they were at liberty to quit the service. But this was difficult because the payments for several months were generally kept in arrears. If they left the service, the possibility of recovering the arrears seemed dim. Added to these the avenues of employment were seldom. During the period of non-payment servants managed to survive on the pittance, that they derived either through loan or charity, for which the importance that they attached as the servants of the poligar, gave an adequate sanction. The money payments were extremely rare. The method most generally resorted to and considered equivalent to a money payment was to give a tuncaw or order to a group of eight to ten peons for collecting the amount from a renter or ryot, who had defaulted remittance for years or from a criminal, who had to pay a large fine. To secure such tuncaws on persons who seemed capable of paying the amount, the peons had to bribe the officers of the feudal establishment. When the tuncaw was issued, their demands were considered as adjusted, whether they succeeded or not in recovering the amount. If they were in urgent need of money or found the
chances of recovery limited, they sold their tuncaus at a discount of fifty to sixty percent, which were sometimes circulated in this manner from one person to another, its relative value being regulated as the circumstances of the person in question were considered thriving or otherwise until the amount was collected or lost. At times the peons received a batta from the person concerned and if it were refused they usually plundered his effects. Normally, however, a compromise was effected with the assistance of friends and relatives, who sold his ploughs and cattle, and with their own contributions rid him of the importunities by paying the peons a half or two thirds of their demands.

The servants engaged partly for nominal money wages and partly for grain, invariably received the particular quantity of grain in advance at a price much above the market rate. A tuncau issued in lieu of money payments on amuldaars, renters and ryots for any quantity of grain was considered equivalent to a money payment. This practice of issuing grain tuncau was not so common in the palayams of Tamil Country as in the palayams of Coastal Andhra-Venkatagiri, Kalahasti and Bommarajapalayam.

Lands assigned in lieu of remuneration were of amarum tenure or cuttabudi tenure. Amarum implied case, and rent for this category of land was fixed on a confessional basis. A village, placed under amarum tenure, was made over to eight to ten peons, who as mirasdaars collected the amount and paid a rent as originally stipulated. It was in the interest of these servants to encourage the
ryots under them to promote cultivation by giving them the proper share of the produce; for otherwise they deserted their villages and settled in other places, where their claims were better respected. It was not the practice with the poligars to bestow upon his servants in this manner the possession of productive and rich villages. On the contrary they selected those lands in a state of ruin and decay, which for the first two or three years the peons would enjoy free from any imposition beyond the stipulated rent fixed in earlier periods. But when the tanks were repaired, water courses were opened and cultivation was established, they were gradually required to pay cutnums or presents until at last they paid nearly equal to the full value of the villages. Thus the assignment of this kind served three fold purpose - to provide remuneration, to promote cultivation and to yield additional revenue to the chief. Under the cuttabudi tenure the peons, who were also ryots, were assigned jungle or waste lands for cultivation in lieu of stipulated money payment. The tenure implied a gift with some obligation. The peons received loans from the poligars for the first two or three years of cultivation of the barren lands and repaid the amount in installments in the years to come. As the lands turned productive, the poligars required them to pay cutnums, which were considered as rent of their lands. The amount first levied was the mamoll cutnum or customary present and was collected every year there after. As the peons carried out improvements yield more of income the poligars collected additional presents. These ryots paid additional rent if they found it not oppressive; otherwise they
settled in other places. On occasions like a marriage in the family of the poligar or the consecration of a pagoda, the servants were called upon to pay special contributions. Such a practice affected the interests of tenants though it contributed to poligar’s revenue.

In respect of inheritance the possession of amarum as well as cuttabudi lands descended from father to son and so on to other degrees of affinity in the male line. On default of heirs, the land escheated to the chieftain. The obligations associated with the cuttabudi tenure were similar to those of amarum with the distinction that the peons were bound to serve either with pikes or match locks, as might be stipulated at their own expense. When they were called for other duties, or were required to attend on the poligar, the two descriptions of peons received the same rates of batta. The two groups of servants rendered identical duties in defense of the interests of the poligar and in preventing occurrences of theft. If they distinguished themselves in battles or in the detection of thefts, they received handsome rewards from their master. While the cuttabudi peons were more of ryots than what the amarum peons were, the differences in the nature of their service didn’t appear very clear cut.20

20.K.Rajayyan, Administration and Society in the Carnatic, Tirupati, 1966, pp.69-72
Police and Justice

During those days of turmoil and disorder kaval or watch represented a basic duty of the poligars. The servants, who actually performed this work, were called the kavalkaras or the talayaris. The kaval system that was widely prevalent in India represented a counterpart of the 'hue and cry' in Anglo-Saxon England. From time immemorial every village had its kaval establishment, controlled by the village councils or the central government. Until the Mughal invasion of Tamil County the poligari and the kaval systems existed as two separate and parallel organizations. The early poligars had nothing to do with the kaval establishment of the circar villages. However in subsequent periods when the rulers failed in affording protection to the villages and when the local communities sought protection from the chieftains, the two systems got themselves integrated, adding to the prestige of the chieftains.

In the substance the kaval system was based upon the principle of 'set a thief to catch a thief'. Accordingly, the responsibility of apprehending a thief was usually entrusted with those inhabitants, who were considered as traditional and professional robbers. The assignment of this duty upon a habitual thief created in him a sense of responsibility. Thus the system sought to rectify a social evil by the application of a self corrective remedy.
The kavalkars belonged to four groups: the arasu kavalkars the nadu kavalkars. the desai kavalkars means government, nadu-district, desai or desam direction or region and stalam place or village. A kavalkara protected the grain, cattle, and other domestic property of the inhabitants and guarded the public places like the roads and markets. If any robbery occurred, the concerned kavalkara was held responsible for the recovery of the stolen property, failing which to pay damages. The services of the kavalkaras were rewarded by a fee called desha

21. In Rajputana the Minas performed the function of the Kallans, entrused with village watch. If adequately paid and properly managed they excelled others, encaged as police men. They did not suffer theft of robbery to be committed. On the other hand when they were out of service the Minas, like the kallans, distinguished themselves as the worst thieves and cattle lifters.

22. Madras Council, Revenue Consultations, Vol.97, p.2246. In the Vijayanagar Empire the police officers belonged two categories -one maintained by the state and the other by the people, the first responsible to the government and the second answerable to the local bodies. In the provinces where the nayankara system was in vogue, the nayaks were made responsible for the preservation of peace in their respective areas. They themselves did not attend to the police duties but appointed subordinate persons for the work. The kavalkaras themselves appointed talayaris for each village under them. (Dr.T.V.MahA!ingam, Administration and Social Life Under Vijayanagar, 1940, pp.130-131.)
kaval which consisted of a portion of the crop, which they protected or a monitory payment in lieu thereof.

The two systems, the poligari and the kaval, complemented each other. The poligars rendered military service to the king and gave security to the country against external invasions. The kavalkaras, on the other hand, discharged police duties and preserved internal order. The poligars were for the poligar territories, while the kavalkaras were largely for the circar lands, doing complementary duties. Both the establishments were supported by the inhabitants. The duty of the sovereign was to see them functioning side by side properly without interfering with each other. The distinct existence of the two establishments appeared essential to prevent the overgrowth of their influence and to safeguard the interests of the sovereign as well as the subjects. However, the turmoil which attended the Mughal invasions and the subsequent rebellions created circumstances favourable for the integration of the two systems. The collapse of law and order exposed the inhabitants to the dangers of universal conflagration. The central administration, distracted by foreign aggressions and internal rebellions, could no more extend protection to the kavalkaras in the discharge of their duties. As they neglected their duties and as the forces of anarchy threatened the villages, the village communities sought and secured the protection of the chieftains and gave them a fee called deshakaval. This development added in the resources and influence of the chieftains.
The kavalkaras, appointed by the poligar, kept watch at night, noted the arrivals and departures, observed the movements of the strangers and reported the suspicious characters to the chief. If a theft occurred, the kavalkara tracked the thief by tracing the foot prints. If it were established that the thief went out of the limits of the village, then it was the duty of his counterpart in the next village to take up the work in pursuit. The last village, to which the thief was clearly traced, was made answerable for the stolen property, which would otherwise fall on the village, where the robbery was committed. The kavalkara was required to restore the stolen property to the owner. If he failed to do it, the poligar forced him to make good for the loss to the extent of his means and levied the remainder upon the entire village. 24 This indicated that the protection of property was the individual responsibility of the kavalkaras and the collective responsibility of the village community.

*Feudal warfare*

The poligars, as they were entitled to do, maintained their own armed


establishments. In this respect, they were guided by three considerations: the duty to perform military service to the sovereign, the necessity to afford protection to the kavalkars in the discharge of their functions and a complex of comparative status and superiority. Frequently, they neglected their duties to the ruler, yet generally constantly they attached importance to the attendance of large bodies of armed men for their appearance in public and the assertion of their claims. The armed establishments naturally consumed a large part of their resources. Their military dependents consisted of three descriptions: the amarum peons, the cattubudi peons, and the mercenary peons; the first two groups were paid chiefly inland and the third entirely in money and grain. The amarum peons were granted lands on hereditary basis. Assessed at a very favourable rate, paying only a quit rent, they were jointly bound to pay the levies as were decided for their village. These peons, placed under the command of a sardar or officer in bodies of twenty or thirty, were required to take a pledge to yield their best services to their master. Their obligations were not only to attend to the summas of the poligar but to prevent theft within their villages. They forfeited their service and land, if they were found not capable to discharge their duties. The cattubudi peons were also given lands. Their tenure was hereditary, but it was less by right than by sufferance. In fact they were ryots, rendering military service and paid by assignments of waste lands in lieu of pecuniary wages. They served their master with pikes or matchlocks at their own expense and made restitution of any
properly, plundered within the villages, that were entrusted to their care. The mercenary peons were recruited only in times of emergency. During active service all the groups of armed men emergency. During active service all the groups of armed men received subsistence in money and grain, exclusive of other privileges granted to them.

The poligars trained a considerable body of men in the profession of arms. The interests of the peons were identified with the preservation of the authority of their master. The peons regard the rights of their chief as paramount and his orders as their only law. When the poligar commanded them, they executed his orders so implicitly that on such occasion, they considered murder and robbery as mere matters of duty, for which he alone was responsible.\(^{25}\) In fact these practices intimately corresponded with the principles on which the poligars themselves owed their military service to their sovereign whether he was an internal power like the Nayakar an external power like the Nawab.

The chieftains excelled themselves in irregular warfare. The weapons which they used were typical of their method of war. In order to assemble their troops they fired sarabogies, a kind of park-guns.\(^{26}\) The weapons in common use included the bow and arrow, cannon, muskets, wall pierces, shields, swords, pikes

and match lock.\textsuperscript{27} The pike was nothing but the bamboo spear, eighteen feet long. Target, spear, dagger, sling bow and arrow too were in use. Clay pellets, prepared by mixing the white of the egg with clay, served the purpose of bullets. Rockets were fired into the camps of the enemies. A peculiar weapon used by the poligars especially the kaller tribes was the ‘valaithadi’ or boomerang. It was a crescent shaped weapon, one end left heavy, while the other edge sharp. Made of some hard grained wood or iron, the ‘valaithadi’ measured about twenty four inches along the outer curve and eighteen along the chord arc. A soldier, who wielded it, held it by the lighter-end and hurled it with tremendous force against the enemy. A whirling motion was soon imparted to the weapon, which brought it back to the spot from where it was thrown, unless it got struck on its victim.\textsuperscript{28} Nevertheless these arms were of short range. The poligars constructed forts of mud or of stone either on deep cotton plain or on the hills for the convenience of defence. They enclosed the forts with barriers and woods, but appeared vulnerable to heavy cannonade.

\textsuperscript{27} Madras Council, Military Country Correspondence, Fort St.George, Vol.15, p.139, Translation of a letter from Nawab Mohammad Ali 12 June 1767 to Col.Campbell.

\textsuperscript{28} Thurston, \textit{Ethnological Notes in Southern India}, pp.556-557.
Money, bullocks and spies were the sinews of war during this period. Money and bullocks played no considerable role with the auxiliary powers as they did with the major powers. However, the chieftains attached much importance to the gathering of intelligence from the camps of hostile powers. The hircarrah or spies, generally Brahmins - for they were preferred as their religious status ensured for them security and enabled them to move freely and unmolested - went in disguise and gathered secrets of the enemy. They marked the information in small characters on a slip of paper or palm leaf called chit, secured it in a quill or a hallow stick or inside the turban or in some other place. When the hircarrah suspected any imminent threat, he swallowed it or threw it away. However, if the enemy doubted that the spy swallowed up the chit, he administered a strong purgative to the spy or kept him confined. Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore frequently resorted to such methods.

In times of conflict the opposing parties as a rule, called upon their magicians to exercise all the resources of the black art for ensuring victory. The competing sorcerers sought to excel each other by issuing one charm or a counter charm. The process ultimately ended in restoring the status-quo ante of the two sides, because the opposing charms nullified each other. Ultimately military superiority and strategy decided the issue on the field. Still the magicians of the

29. K.Rajayyan, Administration and society in the Carnatic, p.29.
victorious party shared in a large part of the glory. This practice was not confined to the wars of the chieftains but was followed in wars of other powers too.  

Usually the poligars never risked a pitched battle. When a superior force threatened them, they assumed defensive positions in their thick jungles. Lying in ambush, they boldly attacked the invading army and wrought havoc. 

30. Dubois, Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, Part III, Ch.9, p.688.

31. The Maravas and the Kallans played a conspicuous part in the poligar wars. In the Tamil classic Kalittokai the Maravas are described as a people with strong limbs and hardy frames. These warriors, fierce looking as tigers and wearing long locks of hair, shot their arrows at poor and helpless travellers and compelled the king at the head of large armies to turn back and fly. (quoted in A General History of the Pudukkottai State, p.62).

The Muslim invaders dreaded the kallans much more than the regular forces. "Uniting skill and agility to courage, they (the Kallans) went out of their woods in small bands, dispersed in the country in disguise, and were always ready to reunite at the first signal ... The Kallan requires only an instant to run like lightning, rush on the horse and carry of his prey ... Soon, surrounded by a hundred adversaries who rush on him he dashes like thunder across their ranks and disappears in the midst of a cloud of dust". (Letter of Proenza, 1665, quoted in Tamilaham in the Seventeenth Century, p.82.) A letter of the Madura Mission gives instances of the daring of the Kallans. In 1734 a Mugal army, annoyed at the irruptions made into its camp decided to destroy the kallar village of Cunampetti. The Kallans relying on their thick woods and palisades received the enemy with such boldness that after an engagement the Mughals retreated after leaving many dead. The letter tells in admiration of the Kallans, whose number was put at fifty, for holding 10,000 Mughals in check. Joseph Vieyara, Annual Letter of Madura Mission, 14 July 1735. The ballads on the poligars are full of anecdotes describing the heroism of these chiefs.
cavalry of the enemy launched a surprise attack, the pike-men of the poligars formed themselves into a close ring encircling the match-lock men, pointing the pikes against the attacking cavalry. They then sat down in the same order and fixed the mother end of the pike into a hole on the ground betwixt their legs, while the match-lock men kept up an irregular fire above their heads against the pressing enemy. in this manner they resisted even the violent charges of the cavalry and sometimes even of the infantry; though they were helpless against artillery fire. Added to these, the poligar constructed the forts in such a way as to guarantee their easy defence. When the enemy besieged their stronghold, their troops threw themselves behind the barries for convenience of counter-attack. The match-lock-men, taking their position on the elevated spot of the fort, fired at the approaching enemy, while the troops stationed at the bastions called out gallantly. The pike-men, meanwhile wielded the sharp pikes from their sheltered enclaves in the walls. The assailants advancing towards a breach on the wall could never reach the pike-men and could seldom tell from whence the blow was struck.\textsuperscript{32} In fact the poligars despite the limited resources at their command put up formidable resistance against the aggressive powers. The chronicle of these feudal chieftains

was marked by chivalry and heroism and ballads composed by local leads commemorated their exploits.

**Consolidation of Influence**

The trend of the times enabled the feudal chieftains to acquire rights and concessions either at the expense of the central authority, usually that of the Nawab or that of the village communities. The rewards and grants made by the Nawabs - whether they were the Nevayets or of the Wallajahs-or their amuldars added to the resources of the poligars. The rival rulers sought the military support of the chieftains not only to sustain their claims but also to defend their authority against external enemies as well as rebel powers. The poligars considered the Nawab as usurper of the rights of the Nayaks, Yet assisted him with their armed men not in view of any obligation to their overlord but in consideration of rewards, that they expected. As the Nawab found himself threatened by a combination of hostile powers - the patlians, the kaller tribes and local rebels, he made it a policy to grant more of authority and more of revenue to the feudal interests. At the same time the local officials called the amuldars entered into collusion with the poligars and permitted them not only to add more of villages with their estates but also to acquire more of the revenues.³³ As a result, the poligars gained in strength and

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allowed the circar only such proportion of the revenue, as they pleased. In order to warrant proceedings they spared a part of the spoil to the amuldars. This practice was nothing more than a division of the public revenue. Repine and violence were not merely connived at but openly assisted and most of the usurpations committed by the chieftains received either public sanction or secret encouragement of the persons in authority.\textsuperscript{34}

More factors worked in favour of the poligars. Neglect of responsibilities and perpetration of enormilies by the central administration left the village communities with no alternative but to seek the protection of the chieftains. Pre-occupied with his own problems, the ruler found it impossible to enforce law and order or to protect his subjects. Inspite of this serious failure, his public servants harassed the inhabitants with oppressive taxation and arbitrary exaction. The circar not only did not safeguard life and property, but did enter into collusion with the criminals in consideration of money. It is recorded in the ballads that if a person paid one thousand gold coins to the government, he was given the freedom to kill any person, whom he wanted to do away with. At Ervadi in Tirunelveli district a person gave an advance of 700 coins, obtained his permission and murdered a villages to the local amuldar. However, as he defaulted in clearing the balance in a week, as agree upon, he was arrested and thrown into prison at Palayamkottai.

\textsuperscript{34} Madras Council, Military Consultations, 30 October 1792, Vol.168, p.5485.
Because of such obnoxious practices of the circar administration, the villages appealed to the poligars for protection. Readily, the chieftains responded, for they reappointed the old kavalkars or appointed their own servants and directed them to safeguard the interests of the inhabitants. In return for this service they received from the villages a voluntary contribution called deshakaval. In this respect the growth of the poligari system to a limited extent, resembled the commendation in feudalism of medieval Europe. In the process of commendation, the individual land owner, to ensure his safety, commented himself to a lord, gave his land to him and received it back as a fief in return for service on his part, or the promise of protection by the over lord. The beneficium meant that the lord granted lands to the vasal in return for certain specific services to be rendered. However, in the eighteenth century Tamil Country the question of security did not demand the surrender of holdings to the poligars, but only the acceptance of his protection and the payment of fees. In subsequent periods in their attempt to escape from the terrors wrought by the interminable conflicts more and more villages sought the protection of the chieftains. Meanwhile the villages which had already accepted their protection in the past enhanced rates usually in proportion to the increased


responsibility, undertaken by the poligars for holding the disorders as pay. Thus the twofold processes - more villages seeking their protection and the kaval villages paying increased rates - vastly extended the jurisdiction and resources of the auxiliary powers. Nevertheless, the consent of the inhabitants in enhancing the status of the chieftains served as the motivating force, through it was always the practice.

Apart from these, the poligars employed other methods to extend their authority over circar lands. One instance was to supersede the local authority. In this case, the chieftain subjected, instead of removing, the circar kavalkars into a complete submission to his will and levied an annual contribution upon them as a badge of their dependence upon him. A second method was to include the inhabitants of the circar villages to settle in the poligar's estate. This practice which appeared as resorted to with the approval of the inhabitants was generally encouraged by the poligar and was usually brought about by his own endeavour. When the managers of the circar asked for the return of the inhabitants, the poligar on his part demanded, as a condition, the recognition of his right to protect the villages against exactions. Threatened with the loss of revenue, the circar had no alternative but to recognise the chief as the protector of the village. This gave him a definite right to interfere in the internal affairs of the circar country and extended his influence. A third practice was to plough on the kaval lands and there by to encroach from one point to another. Whenever this was done to the poligar could
not cancel his real intentions, for at that time he would have had abundance of uncultivated land in his own estate. Nevertheless, he undermined the authority of the central government and brought more of the villages under his direct jurisdiction. Added to these, the chieftains used to diverted the trade from the circar country to his territory for obtaining the benefits, it carried. The first three of these methods were solely directed against the circar interests and the last two against the ruler as well as the inhabitants of the circar villages. In fact widespread disorders, weakness of the central authority and arbitrary proceedings of the local administration enabled and emboldened the feudal powers to take over the rights of the sovereign. This was carried into effect often with the consent of rulers or local officials yet frequently without it. The consequent extension of feudal authority eroded the resources as well as influence of the central government.